



Log Number: 08-17-73
Week of April 21, 2008

LIVESTOCK PREDATION PROGRAM PROVIDES VALUABLE SERVICE

Many livestock producers in the province have experienced first-hand the trouble that predatory wildlife can pose to their operations.

With tight profit margins common in the agricultural industry, farmers can ill-afford to lose animals to a roving predator looking for an easy meal.

To help alleviate the problem for the province's producers, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture has funded a Livestock Intervention Predation Program for a number of years.

"The Ministry provided \$290,000 in the 2007-2008 fiscal year for the predation program," said Greg Haase, the Director of Saskatchewan Agriculture's Livestock Development Branch.

The initiative is a joint effort involving three parties. While the Ministry of Agriculture funds the program, the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board (SSDB) administers it, with some assistance from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment.

"From our perspective, we really count on and appreciate the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board and the work they do," Haase said. "They do just a super job, and are very effective in managing that program. Without their oversight, these situations would be much more of a problem."

The program is available to all livestock producers in the province. To date, it has responded to calls from producers raising cattle, swine, sheep, goats, turkeys, elk and horses who have experienced losses due to predation.

"It's intended to provide a service to livestock producers who are having a problem with predators, coyotes mainly, but really any wildlife that goes after their livestock," Haase noted. "It applies to any species, not only sheep but cattle, as well. Actually, cattle producers seem to be the most common users of the program."

The program oversees a network of approximately 80 predation managers located throughout the province. These individuals are qualified hunters or trappers who, in many cases, have also assisted Saskatchewan Environment or local rural municipalities with similar issues. They are often recommended to the SSDB, since the board strives to ensure the people delivering this important service to producers have the necessary experience and credentials.

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"We sometimes arrange additional training for the predation managers, as well," said Gord Schroeder, Executive Director of the SSDB. "We want to make sure they have as many tools as possible that they can go out there and use. If they feel they require a better understanding in a given area, we'll try to get some training for them so that they have as many options as possible for dealing with a situation."

Five steps are generally followed when help is required through the predation program. First, a producer with an animal that has been killed or injured by predators will call the SSDB at 1-877-299-6999 for assistance. The board will then contact the predation manager who will be handling the matter. The predation manager will contact the Saskatchewan Environment conservation officer in the region to make him or her aware of the situation and receive the proper permits. Once this is done, the predation manager contacts the producer to arrange a farm visit. Finally, the farm visit is made and a producer waiver is obtained.

Once these steps have been completed, the predation manager is able to conduct his or her duties as required to help alleviate the producer's predation problem.

"When it comes to coyotes and other predators, what you'll often find is that there are a couple of aggressors that are causing the problems, so we try to eliminate those particular animals and go from there. We do not go into a situation and destroy everything," Schroeder said.

"If the predation managers notice any management issues at the site that might be contributing to the problem, they also will bring those to the producer's attention."

The funding provided is used to pay the per diems and expenses of the predation managers, making the program free to producers.

"We're finding it's been a very beneficial service to the province's livestock producers," Haase noted. "Saskatchewan Agriculture has been happy to help them keep their animals safe from harm and also to help protect their bottom lines in the process."

More information on the Livestock Predation Intervention Program can be found on the SSDB website at www.sksheep.com/predation.htm.

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For more information, contact:

Greg Haase, Director, Livestock Development Branch
Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture
Phone: (306) 787-5190

Gord Schroeder, Executive Director
Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board
Phone: (306) 933-5582

